



2019 General Assembly Legislative Program

2019 VFC Requests in shaded bold

Community Wealth Building

Virginia First Cities pioneered funding for the TANF for Employment Grant Program intended to provide aid to local governments to eradicate long term, intractable poverty through workforce/career training and access to holistic wraparound services. Our cities are in dire need of assistance from the state for older neighborhood residential revitalization, as well as residential public housing replacement.

Long-term policy positions:

- Maintain funding for the current TANF for Employment Grant Programs at \$7.5 million (round 1) and \$3 million (round 2) in each FY 2020 and FY 2021.
- Increase support for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund.
- Provide eligible working citizens better access to affordable housing and financing for public housing replacement.

New policy positions:

- Support for the General Assembly to establish a State Commission, led by the Virginia Housing Commission, that includes representatives of VHDA and DHCD, local redevelopment and housing authorities, and VFC, to identify financing methods to be developed or employed to assist our cities with transformational, mixed income neighborhoods and resident communication and transitioning resources.
- Use a portion of the unspent balance of TANF funding to leverage funding for public housing replacement.
- Support the development and implementation of an eviction diversion pilot program. Virginia First Cities has been participating in the Campaign to Reduce Evictions (CARE) Program Services workgroup formed in response to the release of Princeton University's Eviction Lab data. We have also attended the Virginia Housing Commission's sub/work group on evictions. The issue of ameliorating evictions is a goal shared by all of our cities and solutions lie in community wealth building, economic gardening, and ensuring access to jobs and careers that lead to sustainability.

Economic Gardening Initiative/Resiliency/Sustainability

Economic gardening is an approach to economic development that seeks to grow local economies from within. The premise is that local entrepreneurs in our member cities create the companies that bring new wealth and economic growth to a region in the form of jobs, increased revenues, and a vibrant local business sector. The focus of economic gardening is growing and nurturing these local businesses.

Long-term policy positions:

Virginia First Cities' efforts to aid member access to program funding to restore and replace aging urban infrastructure has been immensely successful and continues to merit state budget dollars so that we revitalize and sustain our cities as vibrant, healthy places to live and work.

- **Support an increase to the \$2.25 million in each year for Brownfields Restoration and Remediation.**
- **Enterprise Zone Program funding to avoid grant proration to the Real Property Investment Tax Credit.**
- Oppose a decrease or further extension of the cap on the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit.
- Support flood/resilience risk reduction infrastructure projects and aid to localities for tidal and street flooding mitigation efforts including grant matching and Shoreline Assistance Fund.
- Support maximum funding for the Storm Water Local Assistance Fund (SLAF).
- Support for the Healthy Food Financing and the Grocery Investment Fund to ensure our cities have access to thriving, sustainable grocery options and that these businesses succeed.

New policy positions

- **Increase funding for the Industrial Revitalization Fund to leverage local and private resources to achieve market driven redevelopment of these structures. This, in turn, will create a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities and on-going physical and economic revitalization.**
- **Support funding of \$2,510,000 for a Virginia Gateway Communities Program to leverage stakeholder equity and Opportunity Zone investments with local investments in an organized, intensive and consistent effort to create mixed use and mixed modal spaces reflective of our local communities.**
- **Provide \$5 million in FY 2020 for the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund (§15.2-2415) to provide grants or loans to local governments for assembling, planning, clearing, and preparing sites for redevelopment by private developers.**

Education and Education Tax Policy

Virginia First Cities has consistently supported full funding for K-12 education, as it has not been adequately funded since the Great Recession. As VFC policy director, Jim Regimbal, wrote recently, “A quality education is the primary means of breaking the cycle of poverty. Therefore, the question is – what is needed to create a culture of learning in high-poverty communities and provide a quality education to concentrations of economically disadvantaged students? Successful schools must have strong leadership, quality teachers, enrichment activities, and a stable, respectful learning environment to achieve these objectives. Attracting and retaining quality individuals who put extra time and effort in a challenged school environment requires additional amounts of funding.”

Policy Statement: The state Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formula for education operating costs breaks down on a statewide level as 55% state/45% local funding. However, the SOQ formula does not recognize the true costs of education, including pupil transportation, school support staff, providing and updating broadband and other technology, and adequate instructional staff salaries. Neither does it recognize most construction and renovation costs, especially safety upgrades. Local governments match double what is required for basic state education dollars, pay the majority of public school capital costs and struggle to find scarce local tax dollars to keep up with the demands for meeting additional and expanding state requirements to create 21st century learning environments for our children to master the challenges of tomorrow’s workforce, let alone today’s.

Long-term policy positions:

- VFC urges the General Assembly to recognize and fund the true costs of public education using the State Board of Education’s 2016 SOQ funding recommendations. Because schools in high-poverty communities receive around 8.3% less funding per student (state, local, and federal combined) than schools in the wealthiest areas of the commonwealth, the General Assembly should significantly expand the At-Risk Add-On to make up for this difference.
- **Increase the At-Risk Add-on to aid high poverty school divisions from 14% to 20%.**
- **Increase funding for the Master Teacher Residency Program to \$3 million in FY 2020 as well as support for teacher mentoring programs.**
- Support increasing the appropriation to \$1.5 million for Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loans in FY 2020.
- Support new funding avenues for public school construction and renovation costs.
- Support the Extended-Year and Year-Round School Grants Program
- Increase the Teacher Improvement Funding Initiative from the current \$15,000 to a meaningful amount to assist at-risk schools.

- Machinery and Tools and Business and Professional Occupational License taxes comprise a major part of our city's budgets and are extremely important to local government revenue streams. Any attempts to eliminate or reduce these taxes, unless included with an alternative funding mechanism, are opposed.
- Increase funding for recruiting STEM teachers in challenging middle and high schools to \$1.5 million in FY 2020.
- Increase the Virginia Preschool Initiative per pupil amount to \$6500 full day and \$3250 for half day in FY 2020.

New policy positions:

- **In order to fund education initiatives, VFC advocates a two-pronged approach to respond to federal tax changes.**
 - 1. Return the revenues attributable to the federal individual income tax changes to the citizens via an increase to the state Standard Income Tax Deduction and/or provide a Refundable Earned Income Tax Credit.**
 - 2. Retain the revenues associated with the permanent business provisions and use for additional K-12 funding.**
- Support for Virginia Early Childhood Success, to promote a vision for a cohesive early childhood system for Virginia – in statute, as well as demonstration, through a funded pilot project initiative.
- Especially for low-income communities, the state should provide seamless, affordable access for the most at-risk families to quality early childhood services – including home visiting, subsidized child care, and preschool. Low-income working families need accommodations for their children for more than the 9:00 am - 2:30 pm, 180 days a year routine for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Virginia should ensure affordable access to stable, quality childcare for children (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) as the best investment in young children and their families and the long-term economic health of the community.

Health & Human Services

Long-term policy position:

- Restore funding cuts to Community Services Boards (CSB). The adopted state FY 2019 and FY 2020 budgets included reductions to CSB funding with the assumption that if the CSBs enrolled more clients because of Medicaid expansion, the state would make up the funding. However, there will be a major gap. Therefore, the General Assembly should restore the FY 2019 funding and reexamine the funding for FY 2020.

New policy positions:

- Provide full funding for the implementation of the System Transformation, Excellence and Performance in Virginia (STEP-VA) throughout the Commonwealth to ensure that all ten core services are implemented by 2021.
- In keeping with VFC support for prisoner reentry programs, support legislation that would reverse drug distribution or conspiracy to distribute drug felony convictions as a bar to receiving public assistance like TANF, food stamps or housing.

Public Safety

Long term policy positions:

- Support for paying local governments \$14 per day for all state-responsible inmates incarcerated in local jails, for which they are now paying \$12 per day.
- Fund Aid to Localities with Police Departments according to statute (§9.1-169) with a formula that is responsive to urban police departments.
- Support the General Assembly giving local governments the authority to regulate the possession of firearms on property owned, operated, managed or under the control of the local government.

New policy position:

- With the increased usage of police **body worn cameras**, and the resulting administrative costs that come with this use, we request the state refrain from mandating the hiring of additional local commonwealth attorneys and further cost shifting to local governments and, ultimately, the taxpayers.

Taxation

Long-term policy positions:

Virginia's 2019 General Assembly will likely be dominated by tax and spending issues, as the state's cash position will be significantly improved over previous years due to increased revenues.

- Support increasing the Standard Individual Income Tax Deduction to help lower income filers and expand the state's Earned Income Tax Credit to encourage and support low-wage working families.
- Support the modernization of the Communications and Sales Tax (CSUT) to ensure that it reflects the modern telecommunications landscape, which has evolved since the CSUT took effect in January 2007.

New policy position:

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1. Return the revenues attributable to the federal individual income tax changes to the citizens via an increase to the state Standard Income Tax Deduction and/or provide a Refundable Earned Income Tax Credit.

2. Retain the revenues associated with the permanent business provisions and use for additional K-12 funding.

Transportation/Urban Infrastructure

Cities have more difficult street maintenance needs considering infrastructure, age, usage levels, the need to modernize aged underground utilities, and to provide expensive sidewalks, public transit and bike lanes. Several years ago, Virginia First Cities identified that our cities were being shortchanged when it came to primary road extensions. Our advocacy has paid off by additional funding through the new paving and state of good repair programs. We must stay vigilant to ensure this funding continues and is enhanced.

Long-term policy positions:

- Support increased funding for statewide transit capital needs.
- Support a street maintenance funding formula that enhances urban infrastructure needs.

New policy position:

- Support the General Assembly granting local governments the authority to enter into agreements with developers to have a payment in-lieu-of option for sidewalk installation. These agreements would include language allowing the locality to install a sidewalk somewhere else that is beneficial to the community.

The 2019 VFC Legislative Program has been considered by the VFC Board of Directors, comprised of representative from each member city. Each item included in the VFC Legislative Program may not be officially supported by every member city.